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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR REACHES OUT TO REMOTE CORNERS OF MOROCCO

11. Summary: The Ambassador conducted a series of outreach visits across Morocco January 31 - February 7. Taking advantage of the one-week availability of a USG C-12 aircraft, the Ambassador travelled "off the beaten path" to Errachidia, Figuig, and Oujda in the east, Al-Hoceima in the north, and Ouarzazate in the southeast. At each site, the Ambassador met with local officials and local NGO leaders, and greeted private citizens. The visits highlighted USG partnerships with local governments and civil society to promote rural economic and social development. Though anti-USG groups demonstrated twice and called for "boycotts" of the Ambassador's events, we drew considerable favorable coverage in local and national print and broadcast media -- out of 29 total media placements, two were negative and 27 were positive or neutral. End summary.

An Outreach Blitz...

12. In early January, the Ambassador planned a series of outreach visits to parts of Morocco "off the beaten path." He took advantage of the availability of a C-12 aircraft based at the USDAO in Ghana to reach out to areas far from the Rabat-Casablanca corridor, some without regular commercial air access. The visits allowed the Ambassador an opportunity for direct consultation with provincial governors and other local government leaders as well as interaction in the field with Moroccan civil society organization (CSO) partners and U.S. Peace Corps volunteers. The Ambassador made numerous visits to the sites of USG-funded projects targeting rural illiteracy, youth activity centers, employment generation, and agricultural development. In each of his stops, the Ambassador was warmly received by local political elites, by CSO partners, and by direct beneficiaries of U.S.-funded programs.

Anti-USG Elements React...

13. A small coalition of anti-USG groups called for "boycotts" of the Ambassador on his visits to Oujda and Figuig, attracting national press attention. A group of 50-70 persons staged a brief sit-in in Bouafara, coinciding with the Ambassador's stop there, to protest U.S. policy in the Middle East. The sit-in did not disrupt the schedule. There was also a small sit-in at City Hall in Oujda on the day of the Ambassador's visit to the town, although the Ambassador was never scheduled to stop at the site.

...But a Net Gain for U.S. Public Diplomacy

14. In spite of the protest and boycott calls, overall media

coverage of the visit was favorable. The Embassy's Public Affairs Section facilitated local media coverage of the Ambassador's stops, with space allowed for a Moroccan camera crew and print journalists on each leg of the aircraft's travels. This facilitation yielded positive coverage of links between the USG and rural Moroccans, including details of the broad range and extent of U.S.-funded economic and social development projects, even in some of the most far-flung regions of the country. In total, there were 29 media placements, of which 27 were positive or neutral, and two negative.

Visit Highlights

15. In his January 31 visit to Errachidia, the large interior province on the eastern flank of the Atlas, the Ambassador called on provincial Secretary-General Lahcen Amzal (the Governor was out of town), as well as Errachidia Mayor Moulay Zahid Sidi Ammi. The local officials affirmed to the Ambassador that economic development and job creation were their top and overriding priorities for the province, and noted the initiation of local projects funded by the King's National Human Development Initiative (INDH). The Ambassador also visited an information-technology training center benefiting local youth, funded by USAID in cooperation with UNIFEM and Cisco Systems, Inc, and participated with Peace Corps volunteers in an English lesson at a local youth center.

16. During his February 1 visit to Figuig province, in the eastern desert adjacent to the Algerian border, the

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Ambassador, and his European Union counterpart, called on Governor Abderrahman Addi, based in the town of Bouarfa, and visited a MEPI-funded illiteracy project, also in Bouarfa. At the latter stop, several women told the Ambassador how much they had benefitted from the USG-funded literacy training, which had "opened up a new world of awareness" for them, including awareness of their expanded legal rights under the family code, revised by the GOM in 2004. The group then traveled to the city of Figuig, where they lunched with the Mayor, visited an English class led by Peace Corps volunteers at a youth center, and stopped at a public hospital recently refurbished with a grant from the E.U.

17. On February 2, the Ambassador flew to Ben Guerir Airbase, midway between Casablanca and Marrakech, and participated in a ceremony to mark the transfer of more than USD 500,000 worth of equipment donated by NASA, a legacy of the Airbase's former designation as an alternate Space Shuttle landing site. Colonel-Major Abdelali Haouri, Vice Chief of Staff of the Royal Moroccan Air Force, thanked the Ambassador for the USG's donation, which symbolized the two countries' close bilateral military and strategic ties.

18. The Ambassador continued on February 2 to Ouarzazate, a scenic province which attracts a significant number of foreign tourists and international film productions. Welcoming the Ambassador to his office, Governor Mohammed Ichenarn cited job creation as his top priority, and he noted that the INDH was active in several parts of the province. (Note: Separately, local NGO and political leaders complained to poloff of the region's marginalization, and lamented that the INDH projects would only scratch the surface of the province's economic problems. End Note.) The Governor told the Ambassador that the film production business in the province was steady, but hoped more and larger productions could be attracted to the area. The Ambassador also received a briefing from an agricultural development NGO - highlighting the impact of a fungus which has devastated the date crop in the region, and visited the site of a potential Millennium Challenge Corporation project aimed at revitalizing the local date industry. The Ambassador again

participated in an English lesson at a youth center staffed by Peace Corps Volunteers, and distributed soccer uniforms to local youth donated by U.S. private sector contacts.

¶9. In the Mediterranean coastal town of Al-Hoceima on February 5, the Ambassador met with Governor Abdellah Al-Maslout, reviewed the progress of recovery efforts launched after a serious 2004 earthquake, and met with members of the Gateway Medical Alliance, a U.S. NGO providing assistance in the area. The Ambassador also visited a Moroccan naval base for a briefing on the Royal Navy's anti-smuggling operations. The naval briefer told the Ambassador that 6500 arrests were made in 2006, up from 640 in 2003. The Ambassador also met with the local investment authority to discuss potential opportunities for U.S. and other foreign investors in the region, with particular opportunities in the tourism sector.

¶10. On the last stage of his visit, in Oujda, a city of roughly 700,000 people in the far northeast of Morocco, the Ambassador inaugurated an exhibit marking the 50th anniversary of the launch of USAID activities in the country, and witnessed the signature of an agreement between Governor Mohammed Brahimi and USAID to upgrade the food processing industry in the region. In a separate meeting, Governor Brahimi, considered a contender for a future cabinet post, told the Ambassador that Spanish tourism sector investments on the province's Mediterranean coast would create about 8,000 jobs in the coming years. Also in Oujda, the Ambassador visited a U.S.-supported battered women's shelter, a micro-credit project, and greeted Moroccan youth at the USG-financed "American Corner" at Oujda's principal university.

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